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Blood cadmium concentrations in the general population of British middle-aged men.

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Blood cadmium concentrations were determined for 6919 men aged 40-59 randomly selected from general practice registers in 24 British towns. The mean and median blood cadmium were 1.9 and 1.4 micrograms/l respectively and the distribution was highly skewed. The mean levels in non-smokers was 1.0 micrograms/l and current smokers showed a marked gradient with the daily amount smoked, with a mean of 3.9 micrograms/l in men smoking 40 or more cigarettes per day. Whereas 95% of men who never smoked had blood cadmium less than 2.0 micrograms/l, 80% of men smoking 20 or more cigarettes a day exceeded this figure. 1% of the men had blood cadmium concentrations greater than or equal to 7 micrograms/l virtually all of whom currently smoked cigarettes. Blood cadmium levels in ex-smokers were much lower than in current smokers even for those who had stopped within the past year. However, the mean levels in ex-smokers remained higher than the 'never smoked' for several years after stopping. There was little evidence that age, social class, or alcohol consumption were associated with blood cadmium levels after allowance for cigarette smoking. There is substantial geographic variation in mean blood cadmium for middle-aged men which could not be completely accounted for by smoking differences. Towns in the south and east of England all had mean levels under 2.0 micrograms/l whereas the majority of towns in other parts of Britain had mean levels greater than 2.0 micrograms/l. Possible reasons for this geographic pattern (e.g. geochemistry, industrial exposure, dietary differences) need further exploration.

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Abstract

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